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The American Institute of Sacred Literature

A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

What can be known about Jesus, and what are we to think of him? Persons interested in this important subject will, it is believed, be enabled to use their time more advantageously by discriminating suggestions as to books and topics most worthy of consideration. In these pages for four successive months, beginning with October, 1911, SHIRLEY JACKSON CASE, of the New Testament Department in The University of Chicago, will outline a course of reading on this topic and discuss some of the best recent contributions of scholars to it. Questions for consideration should be addressed to the Editors of the BIBLICAL WORLD; inquiries concerning books and traveling libraries, to the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE.

II. THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The books selected for careful reading in this second division of the course are: Schmiedel, *Jesus in Modern Criticism*; Bousset, *Jesus*; and Sanday, *Life of Christ in Recent Research*.

The animus of the historical study of the Bible, and especially of the searching inquiry into the life of Jesus in recent years, is often misinterpreted. Many suppose the critical student to be either a heartless and ruthless invader of the sacred faith of the church, or intent on the devastation of her most precious possessions. There are, of course, extravagances of criticism, and there is pseudo-criticism, neither of which can be defended. But the animus of the critical study of the Bible and of Jesus is an endeavor to find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Both Bousset and Schmiedel are writers of the first rank in the field of New Testament criticism, and have attracted special attention by their work in recent years. Both men represent essentially the same critical viewpoint, while differing in the details. In the work of Bousset the essential historicity of the gospel records is taken for granted and the whole field and course of Jesus' life is rapidly reviewed. Schmiedel's booklet consists of a single lecture and covers a limited field. At some points, to be considered later, the two men come together.

Schmiedel first asks, "Did Jesus ever live?" This question has really been asked with seriousness by critical students in recent years.

By a few it has been answered in the negative. Schmiedel answers with a strong affirmative. His answer involves a principle of study and its particular application, both of which have been so misinterpreted as to merit careful statement. The principle he states as follows: "When we make our first acquaintance with a historical person in a book which is throughout influenced by a feeling of worship for its hero, as the gospels are by a feeling of worship for Jesus, in the first rank of credibility we place those passages of the book which really run counter to this feeling. For we realize that the author's sentiments being what they were, such passages cannot have been invented by the writer of the book. Nor would they have been taken from the records at his service, if their absolute truthfulness had not forced itself upon him." In the application of this principle to the life of Jesus and its records he finds five passages which throw light on the character of Jesus as a whole, to which he adds four that have special reference to his character as a worker of wonders. These nine passages he calls the "foundation pillars of a really scientific life of Jesus."

Some critics of this method have perverted this position into the following caricature: "No one who is in sympathy with another person can tell the truth about him, or give an accurate record of his life and conduct. The truth can be told concerning a person only by one who has an antipathy for him." But, as Schmiedel says, this principle is the guide "of every critical historian in extra-theological fields." As stated by him and applied in a truth-searching spirit the canon is sound. Schmiedel's application has thus been much misunderstood. It must be interpreted in the light of three facts: (1) He was directing his remarks specifically to those who asserted that such a person as Jesus never lived. He was not thinking of those who accepted the gospels as authentic. (2) He singled out these passages for the explicit purpose of showing that there were at least a few sayings in the gospels which could not by any possibility have been invented, and are proof indubitable that the writers of the gospel records were describing a historical character. He mentions them with a thoroughly apologetic purpose. The statement is not intended in any sense to be a depreciation of the gospel record, for (3) he continues his building-up process until finally he accepts the gospels as essentially correct records for Jesus' life. The strict application of this principle gives us, he says, "nothing less than pretty well the whole bulk of Jesus' teaching."

There is one general principle which both Bousset and Schmiedel constantly follow. Instead of starting from the assumption that Jesus

was God and therefore human only in such measure and manner as God could be human and retain at the same time the plenitude of his deity, they start with the human side. For them Jesus is a true human being, and is therefore God only in the sense, measure, and manner in which God may be in the human life of Jesus. The validity of this procedure is beyond question. Jesus comes into our field of vision as a man. The indisputable fact is that we have to do with one who lived a life in human flesh. Every principle of sound logic and common-sense demands that we make this our starting-point in the examination and interpretation of the facts. This, indeed, was the starting-point of the New Testament itself, and if we are to understand its estimate of Jesus we must adopt it. We have no right to assume as true something which lies beyond proper verification and make the assumption a criterion for the interpretation of facts which come well within the range of human knowledge and experience. Induction, not deduction, is held to be the correct procedure here.

The second question which Schmiedel asks is whether Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah. This is a leading topic also of Bousset. In recent years this question has sometimes been answered negatively. It is contended that the Messiah of current Jewish expectation represented ideals so utterly opposed to the spirit of Jesus that to assign to him the claim to be the Messiah is to charge him with the most flagrant inconsistency. He could not have considered himself as Messiah in accordance with Jewish expectations. Nor could he have adopted the term without the content, for he could not then have been understood by the people.

Both Schmiedel and Bousset believe it to be a well-established fact that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah. Schmiedel contends that all the facts point in this direction. The prophecy of Jesus that he would return to earth on the clouds of heaven is, he thinks, certainly authentic. This can be explained at all only if Jesus thought of himself as the Messiah. His conviction of his messiahship rested, he continues, on his knowledge of himself as peculiarly intimate with God. He knew himself to be the child of God and therefore under the duty of standing between God and the people in this matter. This conviction grew on him, and had fully ripened at the time of the great confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. The crucial point, Schmiedel thinks, for Jesus in arriving at this estimate of himself, the occasion for his final decision of the matter, was his conflict with the Mosaic Law. He found himself in the course of his life opposed to the law. For inner reasons he

was unable to yield to it. He knew that only God could abrogate his own law and no one but the Messiah had any right to announce its abrogation. His inner conviction compelled him both to abrogate it for himself and to announce its abrogation to others. He must, then, be the Messiah.

Bousset emphasizes the consideration that when Jesus wanted to speak to the people and lodge in their minds a correct understanding of his own self-estimate he had to use terms which would carry meaning to them. To transfer to them his own valuation of himself he had to use the highest concept they had. There remained to him, therefore, only the figure of the kingly consummator standing at the end of time as the popular imagination had painted it with its earthly colors. "Thus the messianic idea was the only possible form in which Jesus could clothe his inner consciousness; and yet it was an inadequate form; it was a necessity, and yet a heavy burden which he bore in silence almost to the end of his life: it was a conviction which he could never enjoy with a whole heart."

The contention of Bousset is the usual reply to those who deny to Jesus the claim to messiahship on the grounds that are indicated above. Schmiedel also makes Jesus' inner life and intimacy with God the source of his estimate of himself as Messiah. His suggestion concerning the significance of Jesus' conflict with the law is interesting, but it has not won general assent among scholars. Many think the conflict a consequence rather than a cause of his self-estimate.

Bousset reflects the prevailing temper of present-day critical study in insisting that the healing ministry of Jesus is to be explained purely in a psychological manner. The gospels describe him as the miracle-working incarnate Son of God. But in doing this Bousset thinks that they have left the field of the historical and entered the realm of dogmatics.

Both Schmiedel and Bousset agree that Jesus expected that he would return soon to set up the kingdom of God. Bousset expressly connects this with Jesus' self-designation as "Son of Man." Whether Jesus used this term of himself or whether it belongs to a secondary stage in the growth of the gospel tradition has been much discussed in recent years. Many have denied the term to Jesus altogether. Bousset does not agree with this opinion, but a part of its ordinary content he does deny to Jesus. He acknowledges that the term "Son of Man" carried with it also the idea of judge. This he denies expressly to Jesus. He says that it would have been inconsistent in him to have claimed it. He

never overstepped the bounds of the purely human, and could not have made any such claim.

But if, as both agree, Jesus did expect soon to return as the founder of the kingdom of God, it seems a bit of refinement not well supported to deny to the founder the office also of judge. Both regard Jesus as mistaken in his expectation, and there is no sound reason for denying that if he expected to be the founder he expected also to be the judge. In both, and in one as much as the other, he would be the agent of God and not acting on his own initiative. If founder, then naturally judge of who should enter and who should be rejected.

The effect of the unfulfilment of these expectations upon the permanent value of Jesus and his message is considered by both Schmiedel and Bousset. Both agree that the real heart of his message was not vitiated by his expectations of things that never came to pass, or the fact that he even said some things which were not realized. He really expected nothing for the future, they say, which was not a part of his own experience. The core of it all is that for him God was a living, present reality, a gracious father. "In the very heart of the gospel lies not the bloodless image of the moral law but the immovable conviction that the individual personal life has its goal and consummation in God." Jesus is of value to us beyond all others because his inculcation and illustration of the attitude of filial piety toward God is supreme. Schmiedel declares that he would not lose his piety, which he has attained under the tuition and inspiration of Jesus, even if he reached the conclusion that Jesus never lived.

The books are valuable in sustaining the conviction that in Jesus we have to do, not with a myth but with a man of flesh and blood; with one who was so great and brought God so closely home to the human heart that the wisdom and energy of the centuries since have been centered in the effort to fathom the depths of his life and to catch the inspiration of his presence.

The third book in this list is more comprehensive in its scope. In recent times scholars have attempted to interpret the historical Jesus in the light of the thought-forms of his time. The literature dealing with this subject has reached such proportions that it is now looked upon as representative of a "school" or "movement" designated "The Life of Christ Movement."

Sanday, the veteran New Testament scholar of Oxford, has in the present volume traced the rise of this movement, discussed its leading representatives and their works, and subjected their chief contentions to

criticism. His book, however, does not deal exclusively with this question, but is, as he says, a "composite" containing three lectures, two sermons, and three book reviews, which are all remotely connected with the main thought of the work. In the present review we are not directly concerned with this relatively extraneous matter.

What, it is asked, is the central thought, or starting-point, of this new approach to the study of Jesus? The answer is that Jesus was not a thoroughgoing independent, but that, on the contrary, he was greatly influenced by a certain type of thought, which, in his day, was widespread, namely, the eschatological interpretation of history, according to which the end of the age and the ushering in of the new, or messianic, age was to be attended by certain catastrophic, supernaturalistic events.

But why should this be a new basis of interpretation? Is it conceivable that facts so patent as to make possible such a theory have escaped the notice of the host of scholars on whose labors the current views rest? The answer to these questions is that it is only within the last few years that the materials for this theory, namely, the apocalyptic literature, have been available.

In our canonical Scriptures we have two specimens of this apocalyptic literature, namely, the books of Daniel and Revelation, but their true character and meaning remained obscure until they were studied in the light of the non-canonical apocalyptic books. Up to the middle of the last century only two of these books were generally known—"The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" in its later form, and the work now commonly called "Fourth Ezra"; printed as chaps. 3-14 of Second Esdras in our Old Testament Apocrypha. After 1850 there were brought to light the following: the Book of Enoch, the Psalms of Solomon, the Assumption of Moses, the Book of Jubilees, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Book of the Secrets of Baruch. The texts of some of these books were edited and translated by German scholars during the fifties, but it was only within the past two or three decades that they have been made accessible to English readers, through the painstaking work of Charles, James, and Rendel Harris. Even the Germans were slow to discern the important bearing which this large acquisition to our Jewish literature had on the problems of New Testament interpretation.

The first serious attempt to utilize it as an aid to New Testament study was made by Baldensperger, whose brochure, *The Self-Conscious-*

ness of Jesus in the Light of the Messianic Hopes of His Time, appeared in 1888.

Baldensperger's results did not differ widely from the commonly accepted outline of the life of Jesus, but it was a compromise "between the picture that came from a study of the Jewish contemporary writings and that which appeared to result from modern criticism of the narratives of the gospels."

Four years later Johannes Weiss published a pamphlet entitled *The Preaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God*, in which he maintained that the eschatological sense in which Jesus used the term "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of Heaven" was the only sense in which he used it at all. According to this interpretation Jesus looked upon the kingdom as imminent, but not actually present; it was "at hand" in the sense that it was to be looked for at any time, probably in the near future, but just at what time he would not affirm. Moreover, a prerequisite to his coming was a general and genuine repentance on the part of all Israel. This idea was not original with Jesus, as may be seen from the pre-Christian Jewish literature. According to Weiss, this national repentance was not forthcoming, and Jesus, in order to precipitate the catastrophic introduction of the longed-for messianic age and kingdom, devoted himself to a violent and cruel death at the hands of the unrepentant Jewish leaders, to return, however, on the clouds, in power and glory and attended by the hosts of heaven. In short, according to Weiss, Jesus does not found the kingdom. "He only announces it. He exercises no messianic activity, but he waits with the rest of the world for God to bring in the kingdom supernaturally."

Several significant contributions followed the publication of Weiss's book, but nothing of epochal importance until 1901, when Wrede, of Breslau, put forward a new and radical interpretation of the gospels in his book entitled *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels*.

His theory is that Jesus was not regarded as the Messiah during his lifetime, his resurrection being the ground of this belief on the part of his disciples. Wrede's conclusion rests on such passages as Mark 9:9, the early discourses in Acts, and certain passages in Paul's letters. Wrede's chief task, however, is to explain the evident indications the gospels give that Jesus was regarded as the Messiah by his disciples and others. He thinks to show that this representation of the gospels is not historical but apologetic, that Mark's Gospel in particular gives us not a trustworthy presentation of the career of the historical Jesus,

but the view which the apostolic church held of him, namely, that since he had been shown to be Messiah beyond question by the resurrection, therefore he must have been Messiah before his death. But the early church had to meet the objection that he was not recognized as Messiah by his contemporaries, and was put to death shamefully. This it did by showing how, in various ways, Jesus kept the knowledge of his messiahship a secret, making it known only to the inner circle of his followers, except during the last week of his life. In support of this contention Wrede appeals to the following phenomena, which are strikingly characteristic of the Gospel of Mark, namely, the instances in which the demoniacs, who heralded Jesus as Messiah, were commanded to hold their peace; secondly, the commands given by Jesus to those whom he had healed not to make the matter public; thirdly, Jesus' efforts to avoid the multitude; and, finally, the reason assigned for Jesus' use of the parabolic form of teaching in Mark 4:10-12, which is that he did not desire the multitude to know the mysteries of the kingdom.

Sanday records with evident satisfaction the failure of Wrede's radical views to gain a wide and ready acceptance. Wrede's discussion has not been without influence, as may be seen from the following title, *From Reimarus to Wrede*,¹ a book from the pen of Schweitzer, of Strassburg, which Sanday regards as a notable production, and which, more than any other of those contributing to the "Life of Christ Movement," led him to deliver the lectures we are considering. It appeared in 1906, and presented a survey of the notable lives of Christ and attempted interpretations of Jesus, which have appeared during the last century and a quarter. Schweitzer, while not agreeing to any great extent with Baldensperger or Weiss, is himself an eschatologist and carries eschatology farther than any others of the school, for while they regard much of the teaching of Jesus as eschatological, he extends it to the life of Jesus, in which he finds three secrets—"the secret or mystery of the Messiah, the secret or mystery of the kingdom, the secret or mystery of suffering."

Sanday follows his survey of the literature of the "eschatological school" with a criticism of its views, and finally a discussion of the deity of Christ as affected by them.

The book throughout is characterized by the author's proverbially engaging style. There is probably no other source from which one can so readily acquire an acquaintance with the views of the advance guard of European scholars as he can from this product of one of England's leading New Testament scholars.

¹ Now translated into English under the title *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent did the Jews of Jesus' day expect the Messiah to come miraculously upon the clouds of heaven?
2. What proportion of the first three gospels represents the "kingdom" as external, to be set up by Jesus' return upon the clouds?
3. What proportion represents it as a spiritual kingdom, to be established in the heart and life of the individual?
4. Which dominated Jesus, the ecstatic feeling of the apocalyptist, or the calm religious certainty of spiritual experience?
5. What place did ecstasy hold in the life of his first interpreters as in Acts, chap. 2?
6. If the "eschatological" and the "spiritual" interpretations of the kingdom as given in the gospels are to any extent incompatible, which is more likely to have been enlarged upon by the first interpreters of Jesus?
7. What influence did the resurrection faith of the first believers exert upon their belief in Jesus' messiahship?
8. How does modern religious faith in Jesus stand related to the early faith in him?
9. How far does Sanday succeed in showing that a partial acceptance of the views of the "eschatologists" is not incompatible with a belief in the divinity of Jesus?

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.
 N. Schmidt, *The Prophet of Nazareth*.
 O. Holtzmann, *Life of Jesus*.
 W. Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Jesus*.
 H. H. Wendt, *The Teaching of Jesus* (2 vols.).
 G. B. Stevens, *The Teaching of Jesus*.
 R. H. Charles, *Eschatology*.
 S. Mathews, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*.
 E. v. Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels*.
 L. A. Muirhead, *The Eschatology of Jesus*.
 E. F. Scott, *The Kingdom and the Messiah*.
 H. B. Sharman, *The Teaching of Jesus about the Future*.
 H. C. King, *The Ethics of Jesus*.
 F. C. Peabody, *Jesus and the Social Question*.
 S. Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus*.

Schweitzer gives a very valuable survey of the history of study upon the life of Jesus from the end of the eighteenth century down to 1906. For Schmidt, Jesus is a reformer like one of the old Hebrew prophets, and he made no claim to messiahship. Holtzmann represents views widely current today, according to which Jesus placed considerable emphasis upon his messiahship and predicted his return upon the clouds to set up the kingdom in the near future.

Sanday's *Outlines* is a reprint of the article on "Jesus Christ" in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*. This makes Jesus think more in terms of spiritual religion, with less emphasis upon eschatology. Wendt and Stevens set forth an interpretation of Jesus' teaching along lines similar to those followed by Sanday. Charles gives a valuable compendium of Jewish ideas regarding the future life, the coming of the Messiah, and the like. Mathews finds that the apocalyptic messianism of the Pharisees was the controlling thought in Jesus' interpretation of his messiahship. Dobschütz takes a modified eschatological view that has much to commend it both historically and homiletically. Muirhead represents the same type of opinion. Scott presents a readable survey of the problem in its most recent form, and comes out with the eschatologists. Sharman, on the other hand, thinks Jesus was quite free from apocalypticism in interpreting his mission. King, Peabody, and Mathews discuss in an interesting way the ethical and social phases of Jesus' teaching.



Bloch

HEAD OF CHRIST